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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 001216

SIPDIS

NEA/ARP, NEA/RA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/28/2019
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KU](#)
SUBJECT: SATELLITE STATION OWNER DETAINED FOR SLANDERING
TRIBESMEN

REF: A. KUWAIT 1205
[B.](#) KUWAIT 1204
[C.](#) KUWAIT 1195
[D.](#) KUWAIT 1181

Classified By: Political Counselor Pete O'Donohue for reasons 1.4 b and
d

[1.](#) (U) A media brouhaha over remarks that former National Assembly candidate and owner of the Al-Sour statellite channel Mohammed Al-Juwaihel delivered on the air on December 18 (reported refs A and B) which were viewed as disparaging to Kuwaiti tribesmen -- and certain prominent tribalist MPs -- and injurious to national unity took another turn on December 24 when Al-Juwaihel was arrested by Kuwait State Security (KSS) at Kuwait's international airport upon his return from a visit to Cairo. According to press accounts, Al-Juwaihel was held in custody until brought before the Attorney General's office on December 27, where he was interrogated on his culpability concerning three possible charges: violation of the audio-visual law by beaming an unlicensed TV channel, publishing false information, and compromising the security and stability of the social structure of the state. Al-Juwaihel was returned to custody following his hearing, and is expected to face a second interrogation in the coming days. If the charges are determined to have merit, he could be remanded to a court of first instance for further legal proceedings. According to press accounts, Al-Juwaihel denied the charges against him and further denied that he disparages Kuwait's tribes, insisting that his remarks were intended to criticize only those persons who unlawfully take advantage of dual citizenship. Attempts by his attorneys to obtain his release on bail reportedly were denied.

[2.](#) (U) As noted refs A and B, few of Kuwait's journalists or bloggers sprang to Al-Juwaihel's defense and a number of leading liberals joined the chorus of invective against him, arguing that the media maven's remarks fomented discord and threatened national unity. Prominent among those who did urge restraint in the backlash against Al-Juwaihel was Parliament Speaker Jassem Al-Khorafi, who cautioned against "oppression while implementing the law, even towards people suspected of carrying out offenses." In response to criticism of his remarks by a number of tribalists MPs, Khorafi reiterated on December 27 his stance that his aim was not "to defend Al-Juwaihel or his actions, but to reject extremism while executing the law."

[3.](#) (C) Comment: Having only recently survived tribalist-led efforts in parliament to unseat the Prime Minister and three leading cabinet officials (refs C and D), the GOK was eager for a period of calm that would ease tensions between tribalists and the urban elite. Al-Juwaihel's intemperate remarks threw a monkey wrench into this scenario and forced the GOK to take strong action in order to quell tribalist anger. Indeed, tempers have cooled as it has become apparent that no one of any importance has defended Al-Juwaihel's

remarks. (Although a number of bloggers have now expressed some support for Al-Juwaihal's central point that many tribalists are not true citizens while distancing themselves from his provocative language.) Complicating the scenario somewhat for the GOK is the circulating rumor (confirmed independently to Ambassador by a credible source) that the Al-Sour satellite channel is in fact owned by the Amir's second son, Shaykh Hamad, leading some to speculate as to whether Al-Juwaihel was simply a clumsy stalking horse for those wishing to take a slap at the tribalists, an effort that appears to have backfired. End Comment.

14. (U) Septels will report further developments in this case.

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